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ABSTRACT

Professionals engaged in the field of migrant education need a strong central information network to provide information about various new developments in the field. Some of the functions of such a central network would be to (1) establish a clearinghouse and information center on programs, materials, personnel, events and other activities that are directly supported by migrant funds or are supportive of migrant efforts; (2) organize appropriate task forces or committees that would deal with relevant components of migrant education so that the profession would have an official voice at national, state and local meetings; (3) provide assistance to all major national, regional and state meetings to assure that the proceedings of these meetings are properly recorded and disseminated to the appropriate people; and (4) establish a professional association for migrant educators to voice their concerns, lobby for changes, and improve the quality of the profession and services to the children. The establishment of such a central network would contribute to the creation of a desperately needed organized line of communication for migrant educators. It would also eliminate a lot of duplication of services throughout the profession. This paper presents a detailed explanation of each of the functions of this proposed central network. Migrant Directors in each state are listed. (Author/NQ)

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COMMUNICATION NEEDS IN MIGRANT EDUCATION

by

Steve Weisbrod

ERIC/CRESS

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INTRODUCTION

During the past ten years much has been written about the need for continued funding and for additional funds for the education of migrant and seasonal farmworkers' children in our country. Through the Migrant Amendment of the Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1966, approximately 700 million dollars has been appropriated for migrant education during the past decade. Numerous materials and descriptions of innovative techniques are now available to show that these funds have been used in the best interest of the migrant student.

These same funds have also helped to develop a group of well-trained and knowledgeable professionals who are now considered as having unique skills and "expertise" in educating the migrant child. These "experts," like the materials and techniques, are located in various parts of the nation.

Dispersion of such experts, carrying educational strengths and technical know-how, has been to geographic areas in which migrant students are most numerous. Nevertheless, within this national dispersion of professional talent, there remain many other professionals in the migrant education field who do not know how best to work with the migrant student. The result is that throughout the migrant education field and at all levels of the programs there are many incompetent people working side by side with competent ones.

It is appropriate that migrant education professionals learn from their colleagues in other professional fields to better serve migrant children.

Professionals engaged in the field of migrant education need a strong central information network to provide information about various new developments in the field. As migrant educators embark on their second decade of service to children, they should consider the benefits of such a network, and the many various functions it might perform. Some of the functions of such a central network would be:

- I. To establish a clearinghouse and information center on programs, materials, personnel, events and other activities that are directly supported by migrant funds or are supportive of migrant efforts.
- II. To organize appropriate task forces or committees that would deal with relevant components of migrant education so that the profession would have an official voice at national, state and local meetings.
- III. To provide assistance to all major national, regional and state meetings to assure that the proceedings of these meetings are properly recorded and disseminated to the appropriate people.
- IV. To establish a professional association for migrant educators to voice their concerns, lobby for changes, and improve the quality of the profession and services to the children.

The above functions are stated in general terms and do not encompass all that should be considered that is now lacking in the migrant education field. It is hoped, however, that once the above is seriously considered for implementation, additional necessary functions will be considered and adopted as part of the total network.

The establishment of such a central network would contribute to the creation of a desperately needed organized line of communication for

migrant educators. It would also eliminate a lot of duplication of services throughout the profession.

All functions of the central network should have as little overlap as possible, but each should establish well defined lines of communication to assure that each function is well connected to the entire system. The following is a more detailed explanation of each of the functions of the proposed central network:

1. Clearinghouse and Information Center

The migrant child is really a national child and has the same needs no matter what state he is in. This contributes to the need for well defined lines of communication between the states to effectively serve the migrant child.

It is quite possible that the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, which is the clearinghouse for Migrant Education in the ERIC system could serve this function. If so, then its scope of activities would need to be broadened to provide services in addition to those it already provides. Broadening the migrant scope of ERIC/CRESS would probably be the most efficient way of providing the needed clearinghouse services.

Many new programs must basically "reinvent the wheel" when establishing a migrant education program. There are many informal lines of communication but no established line that transmits:

- a. progress on individual project sites
- b. information on personnel interested in migrant education as possible staff or consultants
- c. information on upcoming events

- d. information on availability of supportive services that can be utilized by migrant programs

It is not uncommon to find one program struggling in the process of brainstorming out a product, such as a handbook, while at the same time in another program some 30 or 3000 miles away that same kind of brainstorming has long been concluded and the final product of the brainstorming is being implemented. While it is necessary for each and every program to plan its beginning from scratch in order to meet the individual needs of each child, it is safe to acknowledge the fact that somewhere in our nation each need has been recognized and most likely documented with recommendations and activities.

It is time for migrant educators to stop talking about the need for sharing this type of information and to begin to establish a workable network that will permit a readily available flow of information.

Presently, there are migrant education programs in 48 states plus Puerto Rico. Each state has a state director heading the program. (See Appendix for a complete list of all the directors.) Many of these directors and their staffs have been operating unique, innovative programs for migrant children for many years and are a valuable resource for those states relatively new in the field and less knowledgeable in migrant education techniques.

Interstate cooperation has been discussed for many years at regional, state, and national meetings, but no formal lines of communication, except through the state directors, have been initiated. Here again the central network such as a clearinghouse or information center is seen as the answer to meet the need.

In order for the clearinghouse to serve as a catalyst in its effort to add quality to migrant education, it would have to initiate a survey of the priorities as seen at the national, state and local levels and identify the many programs that are presently implementing techniques to meet these priorities. An organized index to cross-reference these activities would be of tremendous value to the user of the product.

The index should be structured so that it would reflect both strengths and weaknesses of the identified activities. With the weakness component of the index there should be a section for the user to make his or her own recommendations to improve another's program. Such a component would be one of the keys for building quality into the respective components of migrant education and thus better serve the children. The index should take the form of a manual that could be constantly updated by the users themselves. A looseleaf binder could facilitate this process.

Another responsibility of the expanded clearinghouse would be the compiling of a directory of "Who's Who in Migrant Education". The purpose of such a directory would be:

- a. To list all interested persons experienced in work with the migrant student who might act as possible consultants or be potential staff for migrant programs. The directory should include a breakdown of each individual's expertise and actual work background. Such information would give a migrant program official seeking an expert for training or orientation in a particular field a list of experienced people from whom to choose. It would also enable that official to check with individuals who have had the opportunity to be exposed to the consultant about his strengths.

- b. To list locations of all migrant education programs, either active or planned, to assist those interested in becoming involved in migrant education. Such a list could also aid migrant program officials in referring migrants to similar programs in other states. This document should be constantly updated to effectively serve migrant education.

Such a clearinghouse should either be a part of, or coordinate its efforts very closely with, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

II. Task Forces and Committees

It is common knowledge that the migrant population is one of the most ill-represented groups of people in the country. The migrant farmworkers have little or no say in the basic laws and policies that have been initiated that affect their lives. Migrant educators must take the initiative in seeing that the educational needs of the migrant population are met. They must be heard at key decision-making meetings. The needs of the migrant student should be made clear to legislators and educational administrators.

In the past, only a few individuals have made the gallant efforts needed to represent the migrant student at early stages of decision-making meetings. These few individuals have learned through experience how and when to speak on behalf of the migrant when issues such as housing, food, nutrition, pre-school education, vocational education, bilingual education and other topics are being considered. However, because these people are scattered throughout the nation, and many of them devote their time outside

of their recognized professional responsibilities, little real impact has been made. It is time that migrant educators had a receptive "ear" to and a powerful "voice" on individual issues that affect their work and directly affect the migrant worker.

A possible approach to organizing a task force network would start with the need to list all the possible components that are related to migrant education. The list should consist of items such as parental involvement, use of volunteers, treatment of the handicapped student, treatment of the exceptionally bright student, higher education, Migrant Student Record Transfer System, migrant scholarship fund, and others. Once such an exhaustive "brainstorming" session produces a list of all possible components, then one individual should be elected to take full responsibility for relating the following activities to his component:

- a. Compile and disseminate information about the existing and planned activities on both national and state levels
- b. Organize an active committee that would develop an official position paper on its component. This is most needed when it comes to the technical definitions within the migrant education field
- c. Organize presentations and exhibits for all major conventions in order to provide better public relations, education, and dissemination of its activities
- d. Provide continuous communication and coordination between all other identified components in order to work toward the same goal, the best quality education for the migrant student
- e. Establish access to and use the mass media in promoting the component and its role in migrant education.

III. Recorder and Disseminator of Official Migrant Education Meetings

This function of the central network would be very valuable indeed, increasing the communication among migrant educators. Through the use of migrant education funds, many important state, regional, and national meetings and conferences are held. Seldom are the minutes of these meetings disseminated to the participants of the conference or to other appropriate individuals, agencies and/or groups.

The central network would provide technical assistance to any state, regional and national meeting, and be responsible for the following activities:

- a. Attend all planning sessions and become familiar with the agenda that is developed by the planning committees
- b. Prepare to record each session of the conference or meeting in order to have it transcribed and summarized
- c. Provide every participant as well as other interested individuals, agencies and/or groups with a summary of the conference or meeting
- d. Prepare a report in the form of a document which would include the strengths and weaknesses as well as recommendations that are made in reflection of both contents and process of each session.

IV. Professional Association of Migrant Educators

There is little question now that many migrant educators throughout the country have acquired expertise and unique know-how in dealing with migrant children. It is time that the profession became organized so that

its potention for serving migrant children can be fulfilled. Migrant education is now ripe for establishing its own professional association that will preserve and cultivate the profession. It would be through such an association that migrant educators could share ideas and promote their common cause. Today, associations in this country are growing in stature and accomplishment at a faster rate than ever before. If migrant educators want to remain influential and be a potent force in the years ahead then they too should create and participate in their own association.

Through an association thousands of people would get the opportunity to grow in stature and self-recognition. This kind of professional growth is known to have a positive effect on the profession within which it occurs.

An association would also serve as a lobbyist for migrant educators. A progressive association would make the views of its members known to legislators and to government agencies. It should be gathering and presenting honest facts about how legislation and regulations will affect the profession and the population served. It should be reporting new legislative developments to members in a clear and timely way.

As long as migrant educators don't have a strong lobby in Washington, the profession will be powerless. The growth of the number of voluntary associations with headquarters in Washington and various state capitols indicates the increase of concern that other groups have shown in national affairs. More and more groups are becoming active in the solution of national problems. It would be an encouraging sign to see migrant education, as a profession, become part of this movement. The future of migrant children lies in the future of our country. We are expected to

help plan that future. We can better help by becoming organized. A good association would do the following:

- a. Give its members the opportunity to take part in forming and approving the major policies of the profession and the association
- b. Provide a vehicle through which individual members could keep in touch with fellow members through a good association directory and news bulletins
- c. Facilitate the sharing of material
- d. Conduct exciting conventions and good educational meetings covering subjects of interest to the members and the association itself
- e. Be responsible for providing public information and educational programs that would help members tell a positive factual story about the profession to the people who count
- f. Disseminate a clear and understandable budget as well as financial and program reports that would tell how migrant money is being spent and what is being accomplished with it
- g. Help in locating new jobs.

An association would find a number of other activities to become involved in as it becomes organized.

A few of the tangible results of the association may result from its role in:

- a. Serving as a problem solver and information getter for individual members needing assistance in conducting their local programs

- b. Providing an increase in attendance at conventions and meetings as compared to the attendance at past meetings not organized by an association
- c. Sharing new and fresh ideas developed by individuals and then more enthusiastically sharing them with other members via the association
- d. Initiating writing campaigns to local congressmen on important issues

The intangible results would be even greater in number than the tangible ones. Perhaps the most important result might be that the association could offer a way to advance the existing ethical and professional standards of migrant education. This together with a collective strength for representation for solution to common problems would multiply chances for both professional and personal growth.

The individual who is convinced that an association is the next logical step in migrant education and is willing to take the first step to meet this need should begin with a checklist for starting an association. The following checklist of points was developed from recommendations by the American Society of Association Executives.

- a. Is there a strong need and purpose for the new organization?
- b. Do a substantial number of people in the profession believe in the purpose?
- c. Is there an existing organization already working to accomplish the same purpose or fill the need?
- d. What unique and useful activities will the new organization carry on to carry out the main purpose?

- e. What will it cost in terms of an annual budget to finance these activities? Develop an annual budget.
- f. Will a staff be needed? What will the staff cost?
- g. How much will members pay to support the activities and programs? Set up an estimated scale.
- h. Are there strong, articulate, well known leaders in the profession who will help sell the organization to others? Will these same people act as officers? Who are they? Make a list.
- i. Is there any organizing money to start? How much?
- j. How will the new organization be governed? What kind of bylaws? Who can vote? How are officers nominated and elected? What are the dues?

An attempt was made in the past to establish a professional association for migrant educators with the formation of the short-lived association called National Association for Migrant Educators (NAME). Before pursuing the establishment of a new association, the files and records of NAME should be reviewed and the reasons for its failure studied.

All signs indicate that professional societies will play a key role in shaping our unfolding future. Issues such as energy shortages, government economic controls, concern for the environment, and individualism versus technology all stretch before us, long shadows cast by the dynamic present. These issues and more have a direct effect on migrant education and migrant families. For the sake of the profession and most importantly, the migrant student, it is crucial that we start practicing what other professions are practicing. If we don't we will remain an "amendment," an afterthought to all major social and economic planning. An association for migrant educators is a must.

In conclusion there is a significant need in migrant education to improve communication within and without the system. The creation of a central network to coordinate the present efforts of communication would be a major step forward for services to migrant children. However, along with this there are many other concerns migrant education should be addressing, such as:

- a. Programs for adolescent youth
- b. Legislation for infants to school age children
- c. Comprehensive programming for the entire migrant family that incorporates all migrant resources: CETA, Migrant Amendment, etc.
- d. External degree programs for migrants
- e. Changing the system to enable the migrant farmworker to share his resources and to receive his rightful share as do other workers in this society
- f. Servicing the migrant child as a national child.

To meet the above pressing needs of the migrant student, migrant educators need to establish a central network that could serve as a nationally recognized service in behalf of the migrant education profession and the migrant student. Such a network should provide the structure, the organization, the communication and the unity that we so desperately need to be productive during the next ten years.

Migrant education has come a long way in the past ten years and has seen many dedicated individuals serving the migrant children, but we must not stop where we are and rest upon our glories but must continue to improve our educational services for the children.

APPENDIX

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